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Silas Deary


THE
PENNSYLVANIA MAGAZINE
OF
HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY.

VOL. XVIII.

1894.

No. 3.

SILAS DEANE, DIPLOMATIST OF THE
REVOLUTION.¹

BY CHARLES J. STILLÉ.

Two men in the history of the American Revolution are alike conspicuous for the services which they rendered to their country during the struggle and for the ignominious end which they reached. They were both among the most active and useful of our public servants during the darkest days of the struggle, but they are remembered now only as outcasts and traitors to the cause which, in their earlier days, they upheld with so much zeal and courage. Their services in their better days are either forgotten or ignored, and their memory is kept alive in the present generation only because history has branded their names with indelible infamy.

One of these discredited personages was in the army and the other in the diplomatic service of the country. The one was Benedict Arnold and the other was Silas Deane.

¹ A paper read before the Society of the Colonial Dames of Pennsylvania.

They were both born in the same State,—Connecticut. During the first four years of the war they were both (as I have said) among the most active and intelligent supporters of the independence of the country; they both claim to have been driven at last into disaffection and disloyalty by the unjust and ungrateful neglect of their public services by the Continental Congress; they are both supposed to have betrayed their public trust through a love of money; they were both unsuccessful in materially aiding the enemy's cause and of reaping the hoped-for reward of their iniquity; and they have both shared the common fate of traitors by the final decree of that "high court of errors and appeals which men call posterity."

Of Arnold I shall say nothing, but pass at once to a review of the career of Silas Deane, whose treasonable conduct, so far as its motives and objects were concerned, is not so well known as that of his fellow-traitor.

In all civil wars there are many persons of the unsuccessful party who are called by the victors traitors simply because they have been unable to take the same part in promoting the objects of the war, or in the mode of carrying it on, as their opponents. Treason, however, is a definite crime. It commonly involves the betrayal of public trust, usually for the sake of money. It is the highest crime, in a legal sense, in the calendar. Men who may be conscientiously opposed to waging war for any reason, or who think it more expedient to be quiet and neutral in revolutionary times, although they may be regarded justly as unpatriotic, or disaffected, or even as disloyal, are not to be classed in history as traitors, unless by what the law calls an overt act they aid and comfort the enemies of the country under whose protection they live. A double-dyed traitor is one who, having served his own country in a military or civil office, deserts it in the hour of its need, in return for a bribe, and makes use of any power or influence he may have acquired in its service to aid its enemy in the conflict. We had not many traitors of this kind during the Revolution,—men who abused the confidence placed in them to betray their

country,—but of traitors such as these, Benedict Arnold and Silas Deane were shining examples. They were both bribed by the enemy to injure us, and they did all they could to earn their reward. They stand in history, in this respect, with some of the greatest warriors and statesmen the world has ever known, men who were none the less traitors because they were once patriots; with Montrose, for instance, who abandoned the cause of the Presbyterians, in arms for a “persecuted Kirk and a broken Covenant,” and sought the service of Charles I. to destroy the power of his former followers; or with Marlborough, whose whole life was a career of unexampled selfishness, and who, although the greatest general in English history, became faithless in the hour of peril to James II., deserting him to aid William of Orange, and afterwards abandoning the cause of the Revolution, offered again his polluted loyalty in the service of his first master. In the same case was Dumouriez, the most distinguished of the French generals in the early history of the Revolution; the man, indeed, who first taught the French army how to win victory at the battle of Jemappes. He having offended the Convention, and having to choose between the guillotine and desertion to the Austrians, not only chose the latter alternative, but became the military adviser of the enemies of his country during the Revolutionary wars.

These are but a few instances of that form of treachery which bears in history a bad pre-eminence. The curious thing about the career of such men is that their biographies, albeit those of traitors, are among the most interesting and attractive of any with which history furnishes us. They are full of that dramatic interest which always appeals to us, when we are called upon to behold the spectacle of the conflict of violent passions of an opposite nature in the human heart; the struggle between the instinct of a love of country and the profound indignation which has been roused in these men by the neglect of that country, or by its failure to recognize the services which they have rendered it; between the fear of disgrace and the reward of iniquity

temptingly held out; in short, between following the rough, narrow path of duty and trusting themselves to the "easy descent of Avernus." Their history is not that of essentially bad men, but usually of good men who have been perverted to badness by a force which they have not been able to resist; in short, a picture of poor human nature, struggling in vain to resist the temptation to do wrong.

Such, if I mistake not, is the principal lesson which the career of Silas Deane teaches, and these are the characteristic features of the picture of his life which I shall endeavor to present to you.

Silas Deane was born in Connecticut in 1737. He was educated at Yale College; he taught school, and was then a lawyer, and afterwards entered upon what promised to be a successful business career. He gained in his business the knowledge and experience which afterwards made him so successful in France in negotiating the plans for supplying the American Army of the Revolution with the articles of which it stood in so much need. He was among the first, most ardent, and enthusiastic supporters of the cause of the Colonies in Connecticut. He it was who, among other things, helped to organize the expedition led by Ethan Allen for the capture of the fort at Ticonderoga, at the southern extremity of Lake Champlain. He seems to have been specially charged with providing for the subsistence and equipment of the men of that famous expedition, which by its audacious boldness completely surprised the British commander of the fort, summoning him in the name of "Jehovah and the Continental Congress" to surrender.

If Deane had never done anything else than aid in this wonderful exploit, by which a complete barrier was interposed to the invasion of the country by a British force coming from Canada, his name should be held in grateful remembrance.

His patriotism and energy were fully appreciated in his native Colony, and he was sent with Roger Sherman and Dyer as a delegate from it to the first Continental Congress in 1774, and to that which met here in May, 1775. Through

some local jealousies, he was not elected to the third Congress. He remained, however, in Philadelphia, striving to help the cause of the Colonies by all the means at his command. He is said at this time to have been a man of somewhat striking manner and good appearance, accustomed to live and entertain in a liberal style, and fond of showy equipage and appointments. At all events, he impressed the members of the Secret Committee of Correspondence with his mercantile skill and ability. That committee then consisted of Dr. Franklin, Benjamin Harrison, John Dickinson, John Jay, and Robert Morris, perhaps the most distinguished men even of the illustrious Congress of 1775. By these men—they reposing absolute confidence in Deane's capacity, honor, and integrity—he was intrusted with a foreign commission on behalf of the suffering Colonies, the successful management of which required on his part capacity and energy of the highest order to overcome the countless embarrassments and difficulties, known and unknown, in his path. His appointment to such a post by these great men shows their opinion of his *capacity* to undertake so formidable a task, and it is certainly a most striking illustration of the *confidence* reposed in him by the Continental Congress.

What was the errand on which the Secret Committee proposed to send him to Europe? In one word, it was to procure articles for the equipment of the American army which could not be obtained here, and without which the war could not be carried on. In his formal instructions in March, 1776, he was directed to do three things: first, to procure in France military supplies,—that is, clothing, muskets, cannon, and ammunition for an army of thirty thousand men; secondly, to procure articles for the Indian trade, so that the savages on the frontiers might be kept neutral or even friendly in the contest, by receiving their usual supplies of European goods; and, thirdly, to enter into a treaty of commerce and alliance with France, if a favorable opportunity should present itself. Never was a greater charge imposed upon a veteran long-trained diplomatist than that given to this Connecticut school-master,

lawyer, and country shopkeeper. It is to be remembered also that he was the first agent sent abroad by the United Colonies with such extraordinary powers; hence, to the difficulties inherent in the business itself, he was forced, in order to accomplish his purpose, to follow a path hitherto unexplored.

It is not easy to exaggerate the vast consequences dependent upon the success of his mission. We were literally without the common necessities for a campaign. At that time we had men, but we had no clothing for them, no arms, no ammunition, no cannon, and, above all, no money. The wisest, if not the most enthusiastic, men in Congress—like Dickinson, for instance—urged the postponement of the Declaration of Independence until we had gained some credit abroad and force at home by a closer union and by alliances with foreign states. But the patriots were not dismayed, and their main reliance was on Deane, who, it was hoped, would find some way of persuading France to furnish us with what seemed necessary to firmly establish our national independence.

Anxious as were our forefathers for material aid and alliance with France, they well knew that there was but one way of inducing the French government to listen favorably to their appeal. Although public opinion in France at that time, as it manifested itself in the salons of Paris, and possibly in the *entourage* of the Queen, loudly advocated the doctrines of the natural rights of man, and of liberty and equality, upon which the Declaration of Independence was afterwards mainly based, yet our statesmen well knew that such considerations would be wholly without influence in moulding the policy of the French *government* to active measures for our relief. The wise men of the Secret Committee therefore made no other claim at any time during the Revolution, when we were seeking foreign alliances, than that such alliances would promote the commercial and political interests of the nations to whom we proffered our friendship. In France two powerful motives, inviting interference in our behalf, urged

the government of the country to encourage us. These were jealousy and hatred of England, which by the treaty of 1763 had despoiled France of her possessions in Canada, India, and the West Indies, and the profound conviction which prevailed on the Continent that England, since the adoption of that treaty, had profited by the weakness of France to monopolize the commerce of the world, and especially that of America. Mr. Deane was therefore instructed to represent to the French government that by supplying our army and entering into an alliance with us, the French would be enabled to gratify their revenge by diminishing the power of the enemy, and to extend indefinitely their commerce with the rest of the world.

Armed with these instructions, this obscure envoy of an unrecognized member of the family of nations landed in Bordeaux in May, 1776. He transacted there the business with which he was charged, relating to purchases for the Indians, and then went boldly to Paris, full of hope that he could induce the haughty French Court to aid our feeble efforts to become a republic. He was absolutely without a friend in the kingdom; he knew that secrecy as to his mission was essential to his success; he could not speak the French language, and he was entirely unversed in diplomatic usages. He had brought letters of introduction from Dr. Franklin to some of his scientific friends in Paris, and by one of these, in the absence of any acquaintance with personages of rank at the Court of Louis XVI., he was presented to the Comte de Vergennes, then the French Minister of Foreign Affairs. His visit to Vergennes was not only informal, but it was secret also. It was feared that the English spies, at that time swarming in Paris, would discover that the agent of her rebel Colonies had actually been received by the French Foreign Minister, and thus rouse suspicion of the neutrality of France in the contest. Deane, on the whole, was pleased with the manner in which he had been received. He told the minister plainly what the condition of this country was, explaining clearly, not merely that we depended absolutely on the aid of France

for our success, but pointing out also how greatly that success would enlarge French commerce and wealth, and at the same time humiliate England by despoiling her of the brightest jewel in her imperial crown,—the American Colonies.

Although Deane did not discover the secret at that time, it is now well understood that the subject of aid to the Colonies in some form, which France was quite sure would be asked for, had been previously the subject of frequent discussion between the French King and his ministers. The conclusion which Turgot, Maurepas, and Vergennes, the ministers, had reached, after studying the subject in all its aspects, was that it was expedient for France to aid the Americans with arms, ammunition, and clothing, should they ask for them. They agreed, however, that if such aid were given, it should be bestowed in the most private and secret manner, and for the following reasons, among others: It was thought, in the first place, unbecoming in an ancient monarchy like that of France to encourage rebellion against a recognized sovereign. It was felt, too, that before openly becoming the champion of the Colonies, France must be ready to go to war with England; and then, too, France desired, and indeed was bound by what was called "the Bourbon family compact," to secure the alliance of Spain before the declaration of hostilities.

Vergennes was therefore fully prepared to receive the application which Deane had made. According to the latter's statement, Vergennes was polite and friendly and even sympathetic in his tone. While he told Deane that the French government could do nothing openly and directly in favor of the Colonies, and that the question of recognition was in the womb of time, he also said that there was a friend of his, a merchant engaged in large affairs, and who had wide commercial relations, who possibly might supply Deane, at a price to be agreed upon, with the articles which Congress needed for the equipment of its army. He went so far as to promise that the French government would not interfere while such supplies were fur-

nished, so long as the neutrality of the country was not compromised. This so-called merchant proved to be the celebrated Caron de Beaumarchais, the famous author of the most brilliant of modern comedies, "*Le Mariage de Figaro*." Deane, surprised and delighted with his interview with Vergennes, never stopped to inquire how this sudden transformation of a dramatist into a merchant had been brought about, but put himself into communication with Beaumarchais as speedily as possible. With him he negotiated during the summer of 1776 for the purchase of cannon, powder, small-arms, and ammunition for the equipment of an army of twenty-five thousand men. Deane was told by Beaumarchais that it was essential that secrecy should be preserved concerning this contract, lest they should awaken the jealous suspicions of the English, and that his mercantile house, in order to mislead the English spies, would hereafter be known as that of Hortalez & Co.

There seems now but little doubt that Beaumarchais, or Hortalez & Co., were merely secret agents of the French government, which advanced the capital they needed for the purchase of the supplies, and permitted them to remove the cannon from the arsenals. But the comedy, nevertheless, which concealed the direct intervention of that government was kept up until we had made an open alliance with France in February, 1778. Thus the supplies were to be paid for by shipments of flour and tobacco to Hortalez & Co., and that firm was to have the sole charge of the business, the hand of the French government in no way appearing. The object of all this elaborate mystification was to deceive the English government and enable Vergennes to say to the British minister in France, when he complained that the rebels were being provided by its government with munitions of war, that it was a private enterprise for the supply of certain of the French colonies with articles they needed for their defence, and that the government had nothing whatever to do with it. It is not worth while to dwell upon these diplomatic lies. The thing that concerns us is to know that eight cargoes of these

articles were procured by Deane and Beaumarchais from the French government, valued at more than a million of dollars. They were absolutely priceless to us. They reached us in safety after many accidents of transportation, and enabled us to gain the victories achieved by our arms in 1777-78. The men who compelled the surrender of Burgoyne in 1777 were clothed with the uniforms and armed with the muskets supplied us through Deane and Beaumarchais. Let me stop for a moment and ask you to consider what a debt of gratitude we owe to the courage and energy of these two men, Beaumarchais and Deane, at this momentous crisis. It is the habit of this day to regard the first as a vain boaster, a French fanfaron, and the other as a traitor. The just claims of these men for payment for their invaluable services were not settled by the American Congress until nearly fifty years after their death. But when we are inclined to think of Beaumarchais as exaggerating his services, or of Deane as faithless in the end to the cause of his country, we must not forget the cruel and ungrateful delay of Congress, which embittered both of them against the people whose cause they had done so much to befriend.

But Deane's efforts to aid his country in the contest with Great Britain were not confined to procuring supplies for the army. He felt that we had need of military officers of experience, and, although he had no authority whatever to engage any one for our service, except, perhaps, a few military engineers, he made contracts with a large number of officers, principally Frenchmen, who beset him with applications for appointments, and stipulated that they should receive a certain rank and pay on joining our army. This action of his caused afterwards great embarrassment to Congress, as there were no places in the army which most of these officers were more competent to fill than our own soldiers, and their appointment caused great dissatisfaction. Deane justified his conduct by the necessity of keeping alive the sympathy in our favor of an important class of persons in France, and perhaps we may be tempted to excuse it when we remember that it was through his interven-

tion that not only Lafayette, but De Kalb, Steuben, Armand, Fleury, and many other brilliant and serviceable Frenchmen became officers of the Continental army.

In Deane's anxiety to help forward the cause, he made one egregious blunder in his recommendation of Frenchmen as officers, which seems to show that in this matter his zeal outran his discretion. The Comte de Broglie was one of the most accomplished officers in the French army, and he aspired to nothing less than to become the stadtholder or generalissimo of the American army; in other words, to supersede General Washington in its command. With so many precedents in history where an oppressed people have employed foreigners, because of their presumed greater military ability, to lead their armies, we cannot be much surprised at the proposition De Broglie made to Deane, through his aide-de-camp De Kalb, in these words: "In my opinion, what is necessary for these States, now in the position of mere children, is some foreign troops, and especially a commander of a high reputation in Europe, whose capacity for commanding an army should be equal to that of the Duke of Brunswick or Frederick the Great." He then goes on to say that if he is made a prince and paid a large salary, he will consent to become generalissimo, with absolute power. We need not be surprised, as I have said, at such a proposition coming from a soldier of fortune; but what a strange light the letter of introduction given by Deane to De Kalb for the chairman of the Secret Committee throws upon Deane's conception of the character of Washington, as it had been developed up to that time, the summer of 1776! In this letter of introduction Deane says, "I submit one thought to you, whether if you could engage a great general of the highest character in Europe—such, for instance, as Prince Ferdinand of Brunswick, Marshal Broglie, or others of equal rank—to take the lead of your armies, whether such a step would not be politic, as it would give a character and credit to your military, and strike perhaps a greater panic in your enemies. I only suggest the thought, and leave you

to confer with Baron de Kalb on the subject at large." To us at the present day such language in the mouth of an American concerning the leadership of Washington seems inconceivable, but we must remember that in 1776 his great triumphs as a general were yet to be achieved.

Deane was not satisfied with providing our army with officers and with supplies. He thought the time had come when France would listen favorably to a proposition of recognition and alliance; so in September, 1776, he entered into negotiations with the French Foreign Office for that purpose. The sad news of the battle of Long Island, however, and of the capture of Fort Washington reaching Paris about this time, damped the ardor of the French ministry and forced Mr. Deane to postpone urging his scheme until a more convenient season. During all this time, it must be remembered, Mr. Deane was our sole representative in France.

In September, 1776, Congress thought proper to appoint Dr. Franklin and Arthur Lee commissioners to France, who were to co-operate with Mr. Deane in the transaction of our diplomatic affairs there. Of Franklin it is unnecessary to say anything further here than that, as one of our agents in France, his services gave a strength and power to our efforts to secure a recognition of our independence and an alliance with that country which it is impossible to exaggerate. He worked for this object in perfect harmony with Mr. Deane, of whom he said, "that having lived intimately with him for more than fifteen months, most of that time in the same house in Paris, he was a constant witness of his public conduct, and that he was sure that he was a faithful, active, and able minister who had done great service to his country."

Not so with the third commissioner, Mr. Arthur Lee, who was the brother of Richard Henry Lee and Francis Lightfoot Lee, members of Congress from Virginia, and of William Lee, at one time an alderman of the city of London, and then, through the influence of his brother, made the financial agent of Congress on the continent of Europe.

Arthur Lee was a secret agent and correspondent of Congress in the earlier part of the Revolution, residing in London. He seems, from the time he was appointed commissioner to France, to have been inflamed with the most bitter jealousy, not only of Deane, but of Franklin also, and to have misconstrued all their acts, to have embarrassed them in every way, and for years to have done everything in his power to breed distrust of Deane especially and of his conduct as a public agent in France among the members of Congress. Arthur Lee's excuse and story was this: In the spring of 1776, while the secret agent of Congress in London, he met at a dinner-party given by the notorious John Wilkes, then Lord Mayor of London, Beaumarchais, who had been sent by the French government to London in order to secure certain state papers in the possession of the famous Chevalier d'Éon, whom the French Court persisted in regarding as a woman, and whom it sought, for certain reasons of its own, to induce to return to France and assume the proper dress of a woman. According to Lee's subsequent statement to Congress, Beaumarchais on this occasion, without any solicitation on Lee's part, offered at the dinner-table, on behalf of the French government, to send Congress as a *gift* two hundred thousand louis d'or, as well as such arms, ammunition, and other military stores as might be needed. These gifts were to be transmitted in a secret manner to this country, so as to avoid compromising the French obligations of neutrality towards England, but they were to be regarded none the less as gratuitous gifts, although, to disarm suspicion and to give the shipments, if discovered, the appearance of private ventures, some tobacco might be shipped to France as a pretext of payment.

Congress, when told of this munificent gift on the part of the French King, who was said to be willing to arm and clothe our soldiers at his own expense, was filled with joy and gratitude, and much more inclined to believe Lee than Deane. We are always inclined to believe whatever promises to add to our pleasure or to diminish our

suffering with little or no effort on our own part, without much inquiry. The country resounded with praises of "our great and good friend," who had been so generous to us in our time of need. When, a few months later, the articles sent by Beaumarchais and Deane arrived here, and with them came the bills demanding payment, the country could hardly be made to understand that it had been indulging in one of those pleasing delusions which prove to be of "the stuff that dreams are made of." It soon appeared that Beaumarchais denied that he had ever had any such conversation with Lee in London as Lee had related. On the contrary, he asserted that he had no authority whatever from the French government to make any such promise or engagement with Lee as he had represented; and that he, Beaumarchais, had returned to Paris in the early summer, leaving Lee in London, and had put himself into communication with Deane, whom he recognized as the only duly authorized agent of Congress, with the permission, or at least the connivance, of the French government, and had made and carried out those contracts for supplies which I have described, Lee being in no way concerned or responsible for them. Lee persisted for more than two years in the assertion that these supplies were *gifts* of the King, and not *purchases*; that the London conversation was tantamount to a solemn contract; and on that account, owing to the influence of Lee's brothers and other members of Congress, Beaumarchais was not paid anything for his most timely aid for several years. Meantime, it was shown, not only by Deane, but by all the parties to the transaction in France, that these articles were *purchases*, agreed to be paid for in the fullest sense by Congress. The controversy waxed so bitter towards the close of 1778 that the French government, through its minister here, M. Gérard, declared to Congress in the most formal manner that the King of France had made no gifts to us. This declaration forced Congress, on the 12th of January, 1779, to think of paying for the articles sent, and to pass a resolution affirming that Congress was, "by indisputable

evidence, convinced that the supplies shipped were *not* a present." Thus ended this miserable attempt on the part of Lee to claim that Congress had been forced to pay for supplies which were intended to be sent by the King of France, through him, as gratuities, owing to the mismanagement of Deane.

The investigation of this business took up a good deal of time in Congress, and could not well be settled without the presence of Deane. As soon, therefore, as he, with the other commissioners, had agreed upon the treaty of alliance, concluded in February, 1778, Mr. Deane was requested to return home at his earliest convenience and explain his transactions with Beaumarchais.

He appeared before Congress not as a suitor for pardon, but as a claimant for the payment of services which he had rendered the country, for which he had so far received nothing. He had left France hurriedly, so that he was without many of his vouchers for the vast sums which had passed through his hands. The investigation convinced Congress that he had never misappropriated any portion of the money with which he had been intrusted. It was clear that, of the three commissioners, Deane had the exclusive charge and management of the priceless supplies sent from France; that Franklin, who had little taste for commercial negotiations, very properly and successfully gave almost exclusively his mighty influence to the proper diplomatic work of the mission, that of securing our recognition and alliance with France; while Lee spent his time in decrying the work of both his colleagues and misrepresenting it to Congress. Deane, it will be remembered, was recalled from France to give information concerning the foreign affairs of the country under his charge. He was not formally accused or even suspected of having embezzled the money with which he had been intrusted, but he was asked to solve the riddle which Congress could not unravel: how the supplies which had been sent were not gifts of the King, as Lee insisted, but had been bought from the firm of Hortalez & Co., to whom their price was justly due. The controversy was carried on,

while the subject was before Congress, in the newspapers of the day, by Deane on one side and Arthur Lee's friends in Congress, and especially by Thomas Paine as representing them, on the other. Paine insisted that the supplies were gifts, notwithstanding the positive declarations of Dr. Franklin and of the French government and of the agent of Beaumarchais and of Congress itself that there had been no gift, but simply an ordinary purchase. When we recall all that has been discovered since the era of the Revolution of the nature of this transaction, and remember that Thomas Paine, as secretary of the Foreign or Secret Committee, must have known all the facts as we know them, there seems to have been something peculiarly base in his conduct in hounding Deane with accusations of misconduct, when he knew not only that he was innocent, but that he was entitled to the highest praise.

Deane was kept for more than a year attending on Congress, and during this period he was allowed to appear but twice in vindication of his course. Naturally, he became very tired of this treatment. He complained that no action was taken in his case. He begged over and over again, in most pathetic letters to the President of Congress, that his conduct should be either approved or censured, and that a public inquiry should be made whether he had "negotiated a present into a loan or whether he had destroyed public despatches in order to cover the fraud." The Congress of 1778-79, it must not be forgotten, was composed of a very different class of men from that which adopted the Declaration of Independence. From it had gone out most of those who in history are the heroes in civil life of our Revolutionary contest. From Virginia alone, Mason, Wythe, Jefferson, Nicholas, and Pendleton were no longer members. John Adams and Franklin were commissioners abroad, and Jay was soon to become one, and Dickinson did not return until late in the spring of 1779. This was the Congress whose legislation reduced the value of the Continental currency to zero, whose prominent members caballed against Washington in the dreadful winter of 1777-78, which did

nothing to remedy the distress of the soldiers at Valley Forge, and of which Washington said that under its charge "America was on the brink of destruction, that her common interests, if a remedy were not soon to be applied, would moulder and sink into inevitable ruin."

During the delay of Congress, Deane wrote, "My character is attacked, and is liable to suffer from the groundless and base accusations of some and from the open calumnies of others." Still, Congress maintained, so far as he was concerned, the masterly inactivity of silence, although it was forced in the midst of these proceedings to inform the French minister, as we have seen, that it had before it indisputable evidence that the supplies were not the gratuitous gift of the King of France, but that they were purchased and must be paid for. In his last appeal to Congress, Deane tells its members that he has been persecuted in the public journals for several months—referring to the attacks of Thomas Paine—in the most scandalous, virulent, and licentious manner, and accused before Congress of crimes of the blackest description. And he begs once more that he may be permitted publicly to vindicate his character.

Congress gave no heed to this cry from his wounded spirit, and he went back to France to look after his tangled affairs with a heart full of bitterness and a deep sense of the injustice, cruel neglect, and ingratitude from which he had suffered at the hands of his countrymen, after all he had done for them in the hour of their sorest trial.

On his return to France he found, upon an examination of his affairs, that he was absolutely penniless. The stories which had been circulated about his wealth in Philadelphia were pure fictions. He was supported during the remainder of his life by the charity of friends. He had but one resource, and that was his claim against the United States for the services he had rendered during the Revolution, which I have endeavored to describe. The government sent out a commission to France to audit his accounts, and it appeared, after a most thorough and tedious examination, that the United States was indebted to this much—

calumniated man more than thirty thousand dollars. This was in 1787, eight years after his return to Europe, during which he had lived in dire poverty. Not one dollar of this sum was ever paid Deane in his lifetime. Congress made no appropriation to pay the debt, recognized as just by its own officers, until 1842, when it voted his heirs thirty-eight thousand dollars—less than half the amount claimed to be due them—for the services of Silas Deane; a payment made, moreover, it will be observed, more than sixty years after the services were rendered.

The saddest part of Deane's story yet remains to be told. He returned to France a wholly changed man. He felt that he had not only been grossly wronged and insulted by the action of Congress, but he was also profoundly convinced that, with the policy it had adopted, and with the power in such feeble hands, there was no hope that independence could be finally achieved. On his return to Paris he avoided all intercourse with his former associates, the friends of the American cause, and when he met them he spoke with the utmost bitterness and contempt of the incapacity and injustice of Congress. His opinion of the policy and general course of action, of which he had been the witness, was not unlike that of many of the staunchest patriots of the time,—of Wayne, for instance, and of Washington himself. He lived for a long time, first in Paris and afterwards in Flanders, in obscurity, neglect, and poverty; and doubtless his condition was well known to the English spies on the Continent, at that time very numerous. At last, made desperate by the delay which occurred in the settlement of his accounts, and maddened, no doubt, by the sting of poverty, he listened, unhappily, to the voice of the tempter. He took advantage of the preparations made by the English government in the campaign of 1781 to crush the rebellion, to write letters (nine in number), addressed to some of his former friends in this country, insisting on the folly of further resistance on our part to the English arms. In these letters, written in May and June, 1781, he urged,

first, that the Declaration of Independence had been a mistake, no such action being required by the grievances from which we alleged we then suffered; secondly, that reliance upon French aid was a folly and a delusion; and, thirdly, that the best thing we could do would be to submit to the English demands. These letters constituted the celebrated "intercepted letters," alleged to have been captured by an English cruiser from an American vessel which was carrying them to their destination. They were at once published in *Rivington's Royal Gazette*, in New York, and, of course, coming from a man who had once been so ardent and enthusiastic a supporter of the American cause, and who had hitherto been so faithful a public servant, they produced a prodigious sensation. Their only effect, however, was to rouse indignation at the treachery and wickedness of the writer, for all the evils which Deane had prophesied as certain to result from the overwhelming force of the English in the campaign of 1781 were overcome by the masterly strategy of Washington, which had brought into active co-operation with him the land forces of Rochambeau and the fleet of the Count de Grasse, by whose united aid Cornwallis was forced to surrender and the war was brought practically to a close.

The positive proof that Deane was at this time an agent of the British government and in its pay was wanting until the publication of the correspondence between George III. and Lord North in 1867. In March, 1781, the King writes to Lord North, "I think it perfectly right that Mr. Deane should be so far trusted as to have three thousand pounds in goods for America. The giving him particular instructions would be liable to much hazard, but his bringing any of the provinces to offer to return to their allegiance on the former foot would be much more likely than by the joint application through Congress," etc. Then, again, the King writes to Lord North, "I have been only able to read two of the intercepted letters, on which I form the opinion of too much appearance of being concerted with this country, and therefore not likely to have the effect, as if they bore

another aspect." And so, in August, 1781, he says that he approves of what Lord North has written to Sir Henry Clinton concerning these intercepted letters and of Deane, saying that his plan seemed to be the most likely means of rendering them of some utility, and he points out how these letters may be used to the greatest advantage to the English.

Deane lingered in poverty and neglect some years longer in Europe, but in the year 1789 he determined to return to his native country. Whether his action was prompted by a wish to vindicate his character or by a hope that Congress would at last pay him his long-deferred claim cannot be positively determined. He was about embarking at Deal when he was seized by a violent illness which proved fatal in a short time. He was, by his death in a foreign country, saved at least from the scorn and contempt of all good men, which awaited him on his arrival in his own.

Poor, weak Silas Deane! There can no longer remain any doubt that he deserted to the enemy, even if it were not well known that he had become the intimate friend of Arnold, in London, whose hand, as John Jay said, polluted that of every American who touched it, and of other conspicuous Tory refugees. It is for you to decide how far his crime is explained by the position into which he had been forced, and how far it is palliated by the injustice and ingratitude of that Congress which he had served so long and so faithfully.